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THE MORALIZATION OF RELIGION

IF we were to carry our thought back for, say, a century of this country's religious life we might mark a succession of influences issuing in movements which could be classified thus. They all mean, of course, the modification in some way of the traditional Christianity. First, there was the effort to *rationalize* faith, whether in the smaller way of the mere critical understanding, or the larger way of the imaginative reason. This was quite necessary in its place. But it was not all that was needed, nor was it the main thing. Accordingly, to balance matters, we had, in the second place, the effort to *spiritualize* religion. The foremost representatives of this were the evangelical and the sacramentarian movements, with which may be coupled the aesthetic and the intuitive, passing at a later date into the whole mystical tendency that is still so strong, and that degenerates into occultism. Thirdly, we had the effort to *humanize* religion—the humanitarian movement, when literature, and especially poetry and fiction, began to tell strongly on faith, not to say on belief, when people took their theology from Tennyson or Browning, or even MacDonald and Whittier, and positive creed was lightly doomed if it collided with the best instincts of the kind heart. Others, with a more scientific bent in their humanism, are engrossed with our mentality rather

than our poetry, and their great desire is that religion should be brought home by being *psychologized*, as a new style of fiction might do it. Fourthly, there arose the effort to *socialize* religion, with all that rich crop of movements which led some to various schemes of Christian socialism, others to social reform, others to attempts to commit the Church to economic remedies and ideas, others to identify the two great types of Church with one or other of the political parties, others to manifold fraternities and fellowships apart from the Church, others to treat the Churches as no more than religious clubs, or to turn their work from evangelistic to social, as in the striking case of the Salvation Army. All this without a clear and ruling grasp of the social idea dominant for Christ—the Kingdom of God. And, fifthly, we have, working through all these out taking a form of its own, the effort to *moralize* faith and belief, to recognise in Christianity the ‘hegemony of the moral,’ the creative centrality of conscience. It makes the moral experience the ruling feature of Christianity as the religion of moral redemption. It means the tendency to treat the moral and not the rational as the real, to recognize, as the principle of all Christian formations and reformations, that Kingdom of God which dominated Christ in life and especially in death. It seeks to reconstruct all the forms of faith, social or intellectual, by that principle as the authority which is intrinsic to Christianity and is not an imported dynasty. It would open Christianity with its own key. It says that we loose with the power that binds. Freedom rests on control. If we are to speak of the reconstruction of belief the first necessity is a reconstructive authority. Mere liberty can reconstruct nothing; it only gives due play and honour to the reconstructive power. In this country, moreover, the battle of liberty has now been mainly won. And for the sake of liberty itself we are forced to recognize that its very first interest is authority; which must be an authority both moral and re-creative,

one which now-creates the conscience, and, from thence outward, recasts, in so far as may be necessary, the forms of creed and conduct. He that sits on the throne makes all things new. The first charge upon anything that flies the flag of the Kingdom of God is not liberty but righteousness, and the apostles of spiritual righteousness are the aristocracy of faith. All this means at last the primacy of the moral, the finality of the holy, the recognition of Christianity as the religion which answers the revelation of holy love. This is the new Evangelicalism, for which reconstruction means at root *moral* redemption, redemption of the social soul by the last powers of the moral universe. We can moralize Christianity only by evangelizing it, and reviewing its orthodoxy by its own good news and great gift of a Kingdom of God. There is something which must precede the reconstruction by religion; it is a reconstruction of religion. It is the kind of reconstruction, for instance, which does not leave it possible for a man to be an evangelical pillar and a public profiteer. It is a reform of evangelicalism by the gospel of the kingdom, where salvation means something much else than safety.

I venture to illustrate this by discussing the relation of three ideas in particular—sacrifice, righteousness, and obedience—in the process of this moral revival. The great war has cast them all into the forefront of our moral concern, and it may do much to correct things in the religion it has done so much to shock.

For three years now the air has been full of the spirit of sacrifice. It is a good and a great spirit. It is capable of great and good things—indeed of the best things. But not in itself. In itself it is neither good nor bad. It may be used both ways. It is no monopoly of one side, either. It abounds among our worst enemies. But we believe that in Germany it is the servant of national unrighteousness, and the adjutant of Satan. It is the sacrifice of the citizen to a State which disowns moral obligations, repudiates

for State affairs the moral world and its controls in the passion for national power, abolishes international law, and seeks to live in a region beyond good and bad. Such a Machiavellian State is the trustee of unrighteousness. It is the protagonist of Antichrist for the hour. So also with those who serve it. Their patriotism, however sacrificial, is a world curse.

Sacrifice by itself is morally neuter. Taken alone, it is more useful in poetry than in morals. It is more æsthetic than ethical. Let the war help us to this lesson, which had become so needful when sacrifice was coming to be regarded as religion, when religion was coming to be measured by the sacrifice we make instead of the Sacrifice we trust, when martyrdom was idolized, and was consequently falling into contempt because it was exploited without supreme regard to the moral nature of its aims. We needed to be sharply told that the sacrifice by love as a passion might be sacrifice to demons, that reputation was not well lost for such love, that a mere cause did not keep martyrdom noble, that to lay down life for the love of our country might be offering ourselves to the enemies of the race and of the Kingdom of God. Satan too has his sacrifices. We needed to be called above a religion which is one of sacrifice only or in chief, even of sacrifice for love's sake. It is not easy to be explicit here without seeming to disparage high and gallant things. But indeed, I am concerned with the principle of their permanent increase. Let me press it, then, that a soul may sacrifice everything worthy for a love illicit and ignoble. Or the spirit of sacrifice for comradeship may abound among men who are entirely pagan at heart. Romantic love is a stuff that will not endure. Love is eternal as it is holy. Righteousness is the last solemn music of things, as it is the keynote of the Kingdom of God.

One thing the war has done, especially for youth as it is represented at our Universities. It has turned them

from a life of sport, good form, and general dilettantism to a sense of reality. It has destroyed for the time ethical ritualism. It has, indeed, cast us all on a deeper sense of reality, and the religious especially. It has given a blow to the kind of idealism that retreats from history, dreams in the lily gardens of peace, cultivates a sublimated religion, lives upon the brave, and eats the sacrifices of the dead. It has discredited the type of religion that cultivates a piety more or less aloof for fear lest the soul should be sullied or captured by the world. It has shown moral purism to be something else than moral nobility. It has done something to set the Church on a way of righteousness, leaving to God to keep it pure. Righteousness—that is the most real form of reality. I would put special stress on the enthusiasm for righteousness as a sounder thing than the passion for sacrifice, or even the enthusiasm of humanity.

‘Offer the sacrifices of righteousness.’ The higher we rise in the scale of love the more it becomes a question of what the authority is within it. Love cannot live on mere liberty. In marriage it rises to responsibility. Its sound and permanent liberty flows from its authority, the authority itself obeys. The opposite of the egoism from which the higher love delivers us is not sacrifice but obedience. We have to be saved not from selfishness only—the essence of sin is more than selfishness—but from the self-will which so often goes with even self-sacrifice. People may sacrifice themselves in a way so self-willed that they can work with nobody, and they do much to set other workers by the ears. Patriotism, for instance, can become faction. The divine thing in love is not the operative intensity of it, but its moral quality, including its power to convert even unselfishness from selfwill. Christ did not die for love alone but for *holy* love, for love whose prime passion and power was righteousness eternal, for love of the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. He died for that Kingship which

dominated His whole life of love. It would alter considerably some of our time-honoured theories of His death to construe it by His own ruling principle of the Kingdom of God. That, in some form, is what makes all sacrifice divine. For self-sacrifice, I have said, may be practised for ignoble, and even nefarious, means—as in the case of avarice. We have to ask what sacrifice serves. What is its loyalty? What righteousness does it own? To what do you sacrifice yourself? To die for country is not necessarily to serve the Kingdom of God which was Christ's end and is Christ's realm. So to die is not serving God's Kingdom unless your country is serving God's Kingdom in Humanity.

There is, therefore, a greater thing than self-sacrifice. It is obedience. That sounds less romantic; but it is really much harder. It may be less heroic, but it is more holy. We all know that sometimes the hardest form of self-control is to obey duty and abstain from self-sacrifice. But obedience does not always appeal to the romantic age, or the romantic half, of mankind. There are more people eager to sacrifice themselves, or to lyricize sacrifice, than there are who have the spirit of obedience. Real humility is less easy than martyrdom. Yet true obedience to the righteous or holy is what makes sacrifice fruitful, saves it from being thrown away, saves it from being ridiculous. Sound sacrifice is sacrifice in obedience to a righteousness we have taken due pains to understand, and which we have come to an age to gauge. One tires of being asked to respect a belief for which many have suffered; that witnesses less to the belief than to the believer, and not necessarily to his credit. The gospel no apostle need be ashamed of is that which primarily reveals the *righteousness* of the God of holy love (Rom. i. 17). Here again notice that it is not a case of obeying conscience only. Nobody ever obeyed his conscience more faithfully than Torquemada. All the cranks obey what they are pleased to call their conscience—many being more preoccupied with their con-

science than with their duty, as people have been more occupied with religion than with God, with their faith than with the grace of God which it lays hold of. To treat faith as merit is quite parallel to that idolatry of conscience which replaces the worship of the duty that conscience should grasp. The divine sacrifices are the sacrifices of righteousness and not of conscience merely. Which means that often the form of sacrifice that conscience needs most is a long course of discipline instead of a public martyrdom. The real destruction of egoism is obedience to the righteousness of God's Kingdom. And this is the spirit of the true International.

Since spirituality can destroy faith, the practical reform which religion needs is less its spiritualizing than its moralizing. And, within that, it is the change from the supremacy of self-sacrifice to the supremacy of obedience in the sacrifice, from the worship of love alone to that of the righteousness in love, to the worship of holy love. So we rise in three stages—*sacrifice, obedience, righteousness*—righteousness, obedience to it always, sacrifice for it at need. If the world needs to be converted from egoism to love, the Church needs conversion to *holy* love—from love sacrificial to love holy, from sacrifice for its own sake to sacrifice 'for My sake and the gospel's,' to sacrifice for the Kingdom of God, and not simply for any cause that happens to kindle us—and that may blind us with the smoke. There can be self-willed sacrifice, but not self-willed obedience. The cross of Christ was the greatest sacrifice in the world because it was the greatest and deepest obedience. We have dwelt much on that Cross as love's sacrifice for man; we must go on to prize it most as love's obedience to God and His righteousness. We must return to think of the Cross not only as the sacrifice of love for man, and not as the supreme case of the sacrifice that adorns human nature; for the sake of that very love we must grasp the Cross anew as the sacrifice of love for God and His kingdom. When Christ died, was He

thinking more of God or of man—of God and what He required or of man and what he needed, of His gift to God or His gift to man? It was Christ's perfect and obedient sacrifice to a God of holy love that saved man. So we are not saved by the sacrifice we make, but by the sacrifice we trust. That is religion, that is faith. Self-sacrifice is not religion. Salvation by self-sacrifice is but ethic; and it may be poor ethic till we know its inspiration, its principle, and its object.

Now is it not true to say that at the present moment there is more of the spirit of sacrifice than of the spirit of obedience in this country? Perhaps we have exported too much of our sacrifice. The more of the spirit of sacrifice we have in connexion with the army, the more egoism and insubordination we may seem to find in other connexions at home. Soldiers may be dying while commands are quarrelling. We have the spirit of faction in public affairs, the spirit of profiteering in business, and the spirit of uncontrol and 'don't-care' in the youth of both sexes.

Hence when the war is over and the enthusiasm of sacrifice has died down, when we are in the trough of its wave, we may have to face something little short of civil war. People mutter about revolution. And all for lack of the spirit of obedience (by which of course I do not mean mere submission). The war called out the latent sacrifice in the country; will peace call out a spirit of latent loyalty and obedience? Is it latent? Is it there? Of course, remembering how we were surprised by the revelation of the spirit of sacrifice, especially in the youth, we must take care not to dogmatize hastily in our answer to these questions. But is that spirit of obedience to righteousness the solemn temper in which classes promise to face the dangers internal to this country, and peculiar to its love of liberty? That love is constantly trembling on the verge of licence. Righteousness tends to degenerate into mere recalcitrance, and independence to mere self-will.

And all for the lack of an authority which has the right to rule freedom because it creates it.

Take three of the chief discoveries of last century. They were the woman, the workman, and the child. But recall the years just preceding the war. Recall the attitude of these sections of the community. There was a degenerate tendency to believe in lawless force as the engine of a cause. The women were leaders in defiance and destruction. They hoped, in a Teutonic way, to gain by terrorism what better women have really gained by service. The workmen, copying perhaps the egoism of capital, broke loose from loyalty or obedience to their own organization and representatives; and they seemed to entertain the idea of war on society by a general strike. The young grew more and more insubordinate to parental and other control, especially where they became premature wage-earners or premature prophets. And this last feature has been strongly aggravated by the war.

At present we are united in a loyalty to country. But when that has done its work, and we are exhausted morally, physically, and economically, when the country is divided against itself as capital and labour will sharply be, where are we to find the object of loyalty and the source of obedience? Our wise and prudent men are, for the inevitable reconstruction, devising the machinery of a joint board to adjust the two interests, and to enable them to work in fairness and reason. But what will any such machinery be worth if it have not behind it that love of righteousness in the community which is the true citizenship, and which is something greater than fair play or loyalty to sect or party. In a Christian land that passion should be the enthusiasm of God's righteousness. It should be the Kingdom of God. I do wish some phrase about the enthusiasm of the Kingdom might catch on as the enthusiasm of humanity did in the seventies. That international of the Kingdom which we long to see ruling between the

peoples should also take the lead within them. But is it an idea which has much power with us? It is a pulpit theme; is it a public power? Of course if it is a mere dream, another Utopia, a mere obsolete Christianity, one could not expect it to rule. It would be an aesthetic ideal without ethical control. But then if it is a mere dream, how was it the staple of the most potent, the most public, and the most inexhaustible figure in history? How could a visionary found what is, after all, the greatest institution of history—the Christian Church? The idea ruled Christ absolutely; does it rule Christendom? Does it rule the political and social relations of a nation of Christians? Is it ever alluded to by our very able publicists? Is it a motive which our political and social leaders can use on a platform with any expectation of response, or in Parliament without impairing their effect? Yet would a population of God-fearing people, true citizens of God's Kingdom, not solve the social problem? The Church does of course speak of the Kingdom of God; but a chief source of her need to be moralized is that her egoism does not seem to grasp it. How could an egoist sect preach the Kingdom of God? It means, for High Church, the Church itself as a polity; for Low Church it means missionary enterprise, or benevolence more or less sectional to history. But the Kingdom of God is greater than any Church or mission represents. The Kingdom of God is the supreme power deep and driving in the whole moral order of history and society. It is the destiny written in the very nature of the moral universe, mounting to the image of God. It means God's eternal and re-creative act for the humane conscience of all history and society which set up His Kingdom in the Cross. And, with all the great things the Church has done, it has not grasped that, nor taught that, as the public crisis requires it. Which means that the chief part of the reconstruction of religion, theology, and the Church is the moralizing of them by their own

central power duly understood by the gospel of that Kingdom of God. Let that be grasped as the moral intent of the world of history, as it was the dominant power working in the world's Saviour, and flowing from Him. It is not a matter of conversion alone, as the pietists thought. It is not a flight into a better world, but a step forward into it. It is a matter of righteousness and its policy as well as of piety and its philanthropy. It is more than the machinery of beneficent love. It concerns society and not only the soul. It is the whole realm of moral and social ends, not just developing to the ideal but converted from progress to worship. It is a work and gift of God deeply, mystically, practically realized by those who worship in love the public kingship for ever of a holy God in Christ. It is the doom of the exploiter and the sectary, of the honest old Pharisee with his moral dullness, and the devotee with his spiritual egoism. It is the glorification of God's holy and sovereign love by man's personal dignity, social righteousness, and brotherly sympathy. It is not a morality but a religion. It is not sectary; it is the last catholicity. It comes not as a moral demand but as a moral gift, a gospel, a good news. Above all else the doctrine means that the best things are not ideals of ours but powers of God. Life's dominant is not an attractive ideal on the horizon of history, but God's achievement working as the expansive power within it. It means that all the best things ideal to the soul are by the Christian gospel already guaranteed and real. Christ's redemption never can or need be redeemed. Seek first the holy and the catholic will be added.

That may be called theology, but would it not be the greatest reinforcement to public ethic were it active in every conscience? Communion with God, the divine value of the soul, the development of all its powers, the fellowship of love, the joyful exchange of spiritual wealth, grateful delight in nature's good, the passion for righteousness in the power of the holy, the sacred family of nations,

the common conquest of earthly sorrow and social anomaly—such things are not heavenly *ideals* of ours but *powers* of God, already *given* freely, fully, and finally, always at work, as already victors in historic things, whose consummation spreads into the world unseen. It is an unspeakable moral asset when supreme ideals of ours are converted into final achievements of God and dominants of the moral universe. On this rests the gospel, and this way lies its public path. The root of public ethic is the rule of the King of the Kingdom of God.

What are we to do for an obedience, I have been asking, when sacrifice has done its work? And the question, I have said, is the great question that returns, and returns again, to our door, and to our scanty welcome. It is the question of authority. We have been the devotees of liberty so long that we resent the idea of authority; we certainly resent the notion of devoting to such a quest or interest the enthusiasm and sacrifice we have spent on freedom. Yet freedom itself demands that we should attend to it, and attend supremely, freedom which begins to feel serious tremors in the ground she has secured. It is no question of an authority which requires our submission *sans phrase*, but of an authority which is identified with the last righteousness, the last stay, and the last liberty. It is an authority which means the expansion of life much more than the security of a tradition. It is that will of holy love worshipped in the life of the single soul, embalmed in our growing Society, and honoured in our public life—till the instinct of it grow into the insight of it by the civic conscience, speaking in our most gifted men. It is an authority whose answer from us is the grand quest for the public and historic will of God, and the living out of it *con amore*.

I could not go farther on this line without passing into the theological region and speaking more deeply of the divine emancipation which underlies all the moral freedom of

society, and is called redemption. We can really moralize only as we truly evangelize. We must ask ourselves, with new knowledge, courage, and conscience, what evangelical really means, what it has to do with a double ethic, what ails its moral note. The religion of the future must be more and more the religion of the moral soul and its reconstruction; the religion, for the soul, of a *holy* Father's grace, and, for society, of the kingship of the righteous King. The royal law of such liberty much orthodoxy has travestied. But the reconstruction of our spiritual world—of religion, theology, and the Church, is not the rationalizing of it but the moralizing of it. It is the social moralizing of it—as when we insist that the worker's due wage is the first charge upon industry.¹ And it is its moralizing by the central principle of religion, of Christianity itself—the Kingdom of God. It is moralized by that gospel, and the supreme moral act of the Cross at its heart.

The object is not to make religion more plausible. It is first to make it more sympathetically righteous by carrying it deeper than rational systems go. And beyond that it is to make it more imperative; for we need a command as much as a sympathy. But it is also to unite the elements of command and sympathy in a realm of holy love, redemptive and creative for the moral soul and the righteous society. Righteousness as a creative power—we are not grasping that, because it is not at the heart of what makes Christianity Christian for us. All this of course means more than that, by the aid of our scholars, we should realize Christ as a historic person more freshly and vividly than the Church has mostly done. That is a welcome thing. But it would

¹ It was with horror and fear, and not simply with astonishment, that I read recently in the column of wills one item. The head of one of the largest industries of its kind left about a quarter of a million, and of that he bequeathed £1,500 for distribution among certain of his employees. No other public legacy was named. It was time we had war. No hell could be worse than the unavailing passion of such a soul to return and give it freely away.

be still more precious, if it made us that we could read for our mere delight no more; if it made us, with these fresh and living results, to pass to His moral depths; to ask what a personality so quick and powerful came to do and make us do; to pierce to the centre of His one moral purpose and work; to realize, in the new perspective of the Kingdom of God, His function no less than His person, His office, as above all His character; and to lay hold of Him as the Messiah and King of the moral universe in its crisis, and of all society at its moral spring. 'Add to your faith moral proficiency' (2 Pet. i. 5).

The passion for the world righteousness of God's historic Kingdom is the best antidote for the war-weariness which now so easily besets us. We have gone too far and too deep now to turn back, without walking into a calamity worse than the war, and a moral infidelity like the German. God has taken a hand in the game, and we are not free to refuse to be His partners. The issues have become widened and exalted since the war began. The war itself has undergone a certain conversion. It has risen morally in its course to be a crisis in the world righteousness which is bound up with the Kingdom of God. It is no more only a clash of patriotisms. It is a judgement of the Kingdom.

If there are good reasons why the Church should not control the State, yet the same social power in Christianity which makes the Church in its conditions—namely, the Kingdom of God—must also make society in *its* conditions. The moral power of society cannot be different at last from the moral power in the Church. We have but one conscience. There is really but one ethic; the supremacy of the Kingdom of God means that; and it is gathered up in the cross of Christ and its righteousness of holy love as the crisis of the whole moral and historic world. The moral centre of our civilization and affairs must become identical with the moral centre of our religion. There will be recurrent war till this come about.

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